

Ergonomics demonstration project: Wallboard

Need

The wallboard industry has a high rate of Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WMSDs), with work that involves several risk factors, including heavy lifting. The industry belongs to the Masonry, Stonework, Tile Setting and Plastering SIC code (174) that is one of the first 12 industries that needs to comply with the rule.

For years, lifting heavy sheets of drywall has been recognized as a leading cause of WMSDs in the wallboard industry. To reduce these injuries, in 1999 several legislators asked the Department of Labor & Industries to form a working group and study limiting the length and weight of wallboard. After the state's ergonomics rule was adopted, the group's focus changed to evaluating and reducing WMSD hazards related to wallboard installation, finishing, and stocking.

Goals

The goals of the wallboard project are to demonstrate that the industry can:

- Familiarize L&I ergonomists with wallboard industry tasks, and become familiar with the requirements of the Ergonomics Rule.
- Identify hazard zone jobs in the wallboard industry as performed today.
- Identify Best/Acceptable Practices for the wallboard industry that can be used by employers/workers to comply with the Ergonomics Rule.
- Develop and distribute a document describing Best/Acceptable Practices for the wallboard industry.
- Provide examples of ergonomic risk factors, hazards and controls to use in L&I training workshops for the construction industry. All of the products from the project will also be available for industry use to develop training materials.

Project design

The project team included representatives from labor, employers, manufacturing and L&I staff. The group evaluated all wallboard tasks in commercial and residential construction. This included installation, finishing, and stocking.

The first phase involved educating industry representatives about risk factors and hazards specified in the ergonomics rule. Industry representatives educated L&I staff on the tasks and hazards of the trade. L&I ergonomists visited work sites to become familiar with these tasks, interview workers, and take photographs and video. The group meets monthly to identify and review risk factors, discuss proposed solutions, and develop the "Wallboard Best/Acceptable Practices" report.

The team plans to distribute the "Wallboard Best/Acceptable Practices" report through industry associations and L&I. Examples of trade-specific risk factors and controls gathered from the site visits will be available as part of a searchable database on the L&I ergonomics website. The same examples will be used in L&I workshops for the construction industry.

Members of the work group recognize that the construction industry will continue to evolve. The team will reconvene as necessary to evaluate new risks and hazards and identify ways to reduce WMSDs involving wallboard work.

Timetable

June 2000.....Held initial Meeting
July 2000Established project goals, cross-trained team members
July 2001Drafted “Wallboard Best/Acceptable Practices” report
Nov 2001Complete final “Wallboard Best/Acceptable Practices” report
Nov 2001Begin using wallboard examples in construction industry workshops
Dec 2001Assemble photos and video for L&I website

Results

The project will result in three products the construction industry can use to implement the rule:

- “Wallboard Best/Acceptable Practices” report. The report will contain separate sections for wallboard installers, finishers, and stockers.
- A variety of materials for training and education, such as tip sheets and risk factor/control examples.
- Photos and video of Best/Acceptable Practices for wallboard trades on the L&I ergonomics website.